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UNITED STATES DELEGATION
TO THE
WESTERN FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING
Paris, April 29 - May 2, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Date: April 28, 1959

Time: 4:00 P.M.

Place: Palais de l'Elysée

Participants:

United States

The Secretary of State
Ambassador Houghton
Mr. McBride

France

President deGaulle
M. de Villebrunne

Subject:

Copies to:

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After the opening amenities, the Secretary stated it was essential that we should go before the Soviets as a unit, and that it would be tragic if the counsels of the West were divided. He said he was hopeful that the next few days would help bind us together. Although we may not hold to all of the details of the program which we have developed, we should stand firm.

President deGaulle said that the more we wish to agree on details the harder it will be to agree on the whole. The Soviets had proposed negotiations, not the West. Since the Soviets had initiated this problem, we should admit their suggestions. The Secretary agreed that the Soviets were responsible for the creation of tensions. DeGaulle added we should not be precipitate in presenting our projects. The Secretary noted that the Soviets have already published positions which are unacceptable on many points. DeGaulle noted that the Soviets positions may change.

1. The Secretary said that for a number of years it had been our position that we would not discuss the Berlin situation alone without discussing Germany as a whole. We should keep the Berlin problem in this overall context of the whole German problem, European security, etc. It may not be possible to keep Berlin in this wider framework but we should attempt to do so if possible. President deGaulle said that he did not know whether it would be possible to keep Berlin in the same all framework.

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DeGaulle questioned whether it would be feasible to reach any general settlements now. We must learn to live with the present difficulties because no overall solution was possible. The Secretary agreed we should have no illusions but must keep on trying. DeGaulle added we could always try, but that he did not have much hope of a German settlement.

President deGaulle said that Khrushchev's principal objective in having a summit meeting was to have an opportunity to maneuver among us. The more precise are our proposals, the easier it will be for Khrushchev to achieve his end of dividing us. We will never agree on all details. On balance he continued to believe we should make the Soviets come to us with detailed propositions, and we could then judge what Khrushchev has to offer.

President deGaulle said that the United States continued, he believes, to be the strongest power in the world. This might not always be the case; however it was at present. Therefore we should not be intimidated. Realistically, what could Khrushchev do, he asked. The Secretary said he agreed with the foregoing.

President deGaulle then said he thought we should take the initiative from the Soviets on new ground. Our discussions with the Soviets have concentrated on Germany which is what Khrushchev wants. If we were to shift terrain, we should search for some area which would bother the Soviets. He believed that a proposal to the Soviets for a cooperative scheme for the development of under-developed areas would be troublesome to them. He thought such a proposal might mention Africa by name, or possibly some other area. He said his proposal would be that the civilised countries of the world, including the Soviet Union, should band together for this purpose. He noted the success of the United States in ventures of this type such as the Marshall Plan and said that the United States, by reason of its experience and position, would of course play a leading role in this scheme. In response to the Secretary's question, he said such a proposal should be made to the Soviets at a summit meeting not at the forthcoming Foreign Ministers' meeting. DeGaulle concluded on this topic that the essential was to go off the old ground of Germany where the Soviets were in a position to divide us.

The Secretary then adverted to the Foreign Minister's meeting of May 11, and noted that the Working Group had put together a package proposal to lay on the table at some point. This package was not, in all probability, acceptable to the Soviets. Nevertheless we should table these proposals which had a certain public appeal, and place responsibility for their rejection on the Soviets. The Secretary believed this would put the Soviets in a difficult position.

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The Secretary said that he had the impression that the West Germans were willing at some point to make a declaration on the subject of the Eastern frontiers but they wanted something in exchange therefor. DeGaulle said that in exchange the Germans would get genuine independence imposition of no arms limitations, and, later, would obtain reunification. He noted that there did remain in the world genuine anxiety regarding Germany. He concluded that we should not accept the neutralization of Germany as this would weaken the Atlantic Alliance. In response to the Secretary's query as to whether he meant this would weaken NATO, deGaulle replied affirmatively that it would weaken NATO but that, beyond that, it would weaken the Atlantic Alliance.

DeGaulle said that there was no hurry on the German matter and that we would go on for months and months of negotiating. He thought that in the meantime the Soviets might make a move in some other area, and asked for the Secretary's evaluation of the situation in the East. The Secretary replied that Iraq was unfortunately moving towards Communism. He said communization of the country was not complete but was particularly marked in the security field, and in the administration. He expressed doubt that Kassim can prevent further slipping in the direction of Communism. DeGaulle said the Soviets might make some move in the Middle East during a conference on Germany. He added he did not believe they were aiming directly at the Middle East, but rather at Africa which was close to Europe and to America, and was also relatively an "empty" part of the world. The Secretary recounted a specific instance which occurred some ten years ago as indicative of Soviet preoccupation with Africa and of the Middle East as an avenue to Africa.

DeGaulle then referred to the recent Warsaw Pact meeting, and asked whether it was the Secretary's view that the participation of the Chinese Communists had any particular significance. He wondered if it represented a desire to have the Chinese participate in international gatherings. The Secretary replied that he thought the Soviets were under some pressure from the Chinese Communists to include the latter in various international meetings.

General deGaulle then referred again to forthcoming meetings, and noted that they might be enlarged to include Poland and Czechoslovakia. He said under these circumstances Italy should be invited to join. He said he favored maintaining the present formula and believed we should not become too numerous. However, if others were invited, we should not forget Italy. The Secretary agreed, replying that our position was that, if any other countries were added Italy should be included.

The Secretary concluded referring to the recent tripartite talks held in Washington. He noted there had been a series of meetings, and he thought they have made progress in the direction which

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President deGaulle inquired if we believed there should be a summit meeting if the Foreign Ministers' meeting produced no results. The Secretary replied in the negative. He believed the minimum results of the May 11 meeting which would justify holding a summit meeting would be the achievement of a modus vivendi for Berlin which would last for some time.

President deGaulle then referred to his recent talks with MacMillan and also to the latter's talks with the President. He said he had the impression that Macmillan had been affected (marqué) by his trip to Moscow and was determined to find some ground for negotiation with the Soviets. He added that the United Kingdom would always be looking for a way to accept some of the views of Khrushchev. He believed this was an element in future negotiations which should always be borne in mind. The Secretary said the Macmillan appeared more hopeful than did we of the possibility of undertaking genuine negotiations with the Soviets. He noted the British view that only Khrushchev personally could undertake meaningful negotiations, and they would therefore jump for the summit meeting inasmuch as the Foreign Ministers' meeting, in their view, could not reach any effective agreement. DeGaulle agreed these were the British views, but said that if we faced the Soviets without some previous progress and became involved in a battle with Khrushchev, the net effect would be bad. He thought the Foreign Ministers' meeting important. The Secretary said that the President has the same idea and considered the Foreign Ministers' meeting an important probing operation.

DeGaulle then said that the French position on Germany had already been given. At the present time it was presumably not possible to reach a German settlement. As to the future, there would one day be German reunification but this was not an urgent problem for the West nor for the East. There was no reason likewise from the German viewpoint to rush. With regard to the problem of the two Germanies, he favored practical contacts between West and East Germany, though not going so far as the recognition of East Germany. However, it would be helpful if the two parts of Germany had practical contacts. With regard to the frontier question, we should not change the Oder-Neisse line. Germany had lost the war and it was normal she should pay some price. If we were to attempt to change the Oder-Neisse line, we should lose the Poles and give Khrushchev a propaganda argument. Furthermore this would not help Germany, and there were anyway few Germans living in this area now. Therefore, this was not worth fighting about. Likewise there should be no special status for Germany, and no arms limitations on Germany. Germany should be free to select the alliance of her choosing. West Germany should have a real independence rather than an artificial unity.

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The General wanted, and added that a number of small groups of experts had been established to study specific projects. He thought these talks were proving successful.

General deGaulle concluded asking after the health of the President and expressing his profound regret at the illness of former Secretary Dulles.

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